Visual Identity Guide

for Nonprofits

DYI

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This guide is for all the nonprofit executive directors who wear too many hats and due to tight budgets, need to DIY.

Whether you are a one-person shop or a 20 person office, you probably don't have a marketing team or in-house design studio to create all the collateral material needed to promote your organization's mission consistently or effectively. You may farm out the work to several vendors or freelancers and may even produce some of it yourself in (gasp) Word or Publisher. So the question is, does all your material have a cohesive look? Or, do the pieces look inconsistent with different fonts, colors, and tone?

A visual identity guide or style guide will help with that. You probably already have a logo and mission statement which is a great start, but your brand or corporate identity encompasses more than that. It's your positioning, voice, and visual identity (fonts, colors, and tone) that maintain consistency.

I find that the marketing materials for small or startup nonprofits can be sorely inconsistent. Creating a guide that you can give to your vendors and staff lets them know the appropriate fonts, colors and logo files available for them to create a consistent identity across all media platforms.

Why is a visual identity guide important? Consistency. Your goal is to fund the mission, you need donors to do that. Your key stakeholders, donors or patrons need to trust you and you build trust by interacting with them. They need to recognize you and if your marketing pieces don't have a cohesive look, it will take longer to build that trust. Hence your need for building a guide. Let's get started.

The Logo

Yes, you have a logo, but do you know which file type to use for digital and print platforms?

It is important to have several file types of your logo. But if you have only one, it better be a Vector. All other file types can be produced from this. **The Vector file is scalable** and that is why it's so important to have. If you need to embroider hats or produce large scale signage such as a billboard, this file will not deteriorate as it scales in size. It typically is produced in Adobe Illustrator and may have one of these file tags at the end: AI, EPS or PDF. Your printer or designer will be able to tell you once they open it in a Vector-based program.

Once you have identified the Vector logo, name the file with Vector in the name such as OrganizationLogo**Vector**.PDF. Having it as a PDF will enable you to view it without the native program, so ask your service provider to save the logo as a PDF and have all the fonts converted to outlines. This will ensure there are no font problems when opened in the native program.

Your Vector file is great for printing, but what about Email, Web, and Word?

A JPG is useful for those, as well as, GIF and PNG. Again your webmaster can convert the Vector-based file, but for your everyday use, keep a JPG on hand.

The checkerboard background shows that the logo has a transparency.

In addition to color, you'll also want the logo in black, and a white or "knockout" version with a transparent background so it can be placed on photos or colored backgrounds. The Vector file usually has a transparent background, but for digital, a transparent background usually has a GIF or PNG tag. JPG's are not transparent.
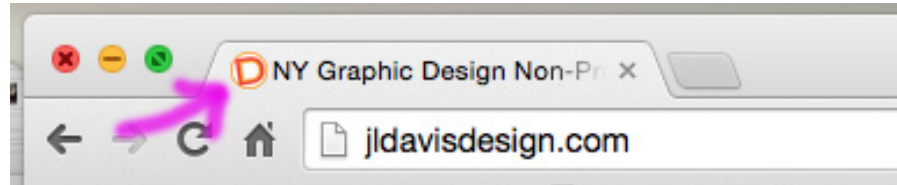
Yes, Size Does Matter.

Print files are big. Web are small.

Anything else I should know?

Yes, there are many times when your logo has to fit into a square on the social media platforms, if you have a wide typeset logo having another version is helpful. It's also nice to have a favicon. A faviWHAT? That is the small icon you typically see next to your url in the browser.
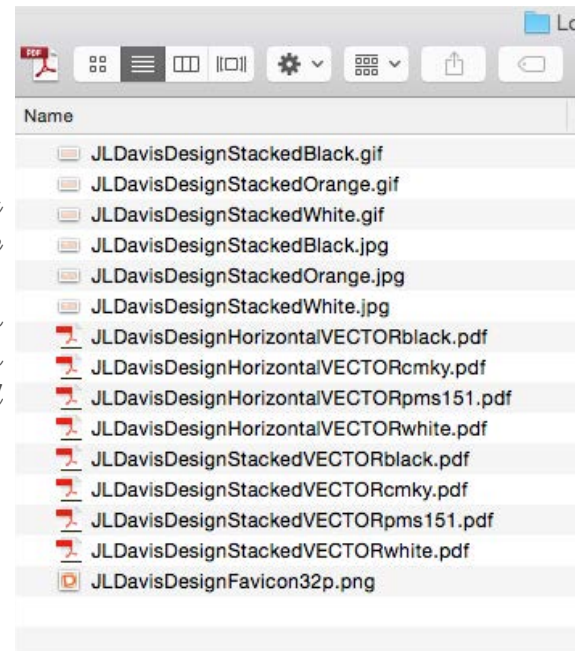

In the example below, my logo is typeset in one line. I created a stacked version for times when it needs to be more compact. I also created the favicon above, the small icon can be very useful on your social media platforms. The logo keeps the same font and color, so it easily represents the brand in a consistent way. If you only have the one logo, it would be best to let a professional pull together the various file types and versions with quickly identifiable file names. Once you have them, you'll be able to confidently utilize them.

JL DAVIS DESIGN

JL DAVIS DESIGN

Now this is a comprehensive logo folder. It has logos for print and web in color and black and white.

Name

- JLDavisDesignStackedBlack.gif
- JLDavisDesignStackedOrange.gif
- JLDavisDesignStackedWhite.gif
- JLDavisDesignStackedBlack.jpg
- JLDavisDesignStackedOrange.jpg
- JLDavisDesignStackedWhite.jpg
- JLDavisDesignHorizontalVECTORblack.pdf
- JLDavisDesignHorizontalVECTORcmky.pdf
- JLDavisDesignHorizontalVECTORpms151.pdf
- JLDavisDesignHorizontalVECTORwhite.pdf
- JLDavisDesignStackedVECTORblack.pdf
- JLDavisDesignStackedVECTORcmky.pdf
- JLDavisDesignStackedVECTORpms151.pdf
- JLDavisDesignStackedVECTORwhite.pdf
- JLDavisDesignFavicon32p.png

The Colors

It's not about you.

You probably have at least one color in your logo, but if you're starting out and only have black, remember it's not about your likes and dislikes. Choose your colors wisely and make sure they reflect the tone of the organization, so your colors will be very different if your mission is helping animals versus bringing funding to culture and arts programming. There are dozens of articles on the psychology of color online. A good book is **Color – Messages & Meanings: A PANTONE Color Resource** by Leatrice Eiseman. If you're going it alone, keep it simple, two or three colors max.

PMS and CMYK are for print. RGB is digital.

Above are PMS chips, the "C" stands for coated, the "U" uncoated. The ink is the same but appears different on various paper stocks.

PMS 151
60M 100Y
R245 G130 B32
#F5821F

Your orange is my tangerine.

Once your palette is chosen you'll find printers and designers asking about what your PMS color is or the color breakdown. PMS 151 at left is a solid ink mix by Pantone. It's the industry standard for color. Having a Pantone or "PMS" chip help your vendors know what color you are going for. You would be surprised how different a color can appear depending on what device or paper you view it on. Which leads us to the breakdown of colors. Your Pantone color will convert to CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow and black) for four-color process printing and RGB or HEX on digital devices such as phones, tablets, and computers. They will not match exactly but be close. Bottom line, consistency in color across all your marketing pieces is important. Ask your service provider the color conversions so you have them on file. At left gives the orange breakdown I use in my palette for the assorted color spaces.

The Fonts/Typeface*

Less is more, really.

Slapping your logo on a page does not make your marketing material branded. It is the fonts and colors that play a large part in your visual consistency. Most logos have one or two fonts. Find out what they are and then use them for all correspondence internal and external. It may mean purchasing a license for them if they are not loaded on your computer. There are different licenses for desktop and web, to save money use a stock font for your website, keep it clean and legible. You will want the bolds and italics of the fonts, as well, for emphasis in letters, captions, and call to actions.

If you have what might be described as a decorative or display font, that should be used sparingly, say for headlines and callouts. It becomes tedious to read as a block of copy. Also, I would warn against using light text on dark backgrounds in large amounts. It is best left to the experts. You want to actually be able to read the message you worked so hard to write. Consider your audience, if the bulk of your donor base is 40+, letters set in 9pt are not easily read and they will put it down. It doesn't matter if it looks cool. What matters is that the message is read.

For the purpose of putting fonts on a page for your guide, see below. In general your primary typeface will be used for all the body text, secondary for headlines and callouts. If you choose not to purchase a special font for your website, that would be the screen font. The primary and secondary can be used as art on the web page, but I don't recommend that. Give me a shout to discuss the whys of it all.

Primary Typeface	Secondary Typeface	On Screen Typeface
Franklin Gothic	Garamond	Arial
Book	Regular	Regular
Book Italic	*Italic*	*Italic*
Demi	**Bold**	**Bold**
Demi Italic	***Bold Italic***	***Bold Italic***
1234567890	1234567890	1234567890

*At the risk of offending my design colleagues, I use font interchangeably with typeface. For those who want more information than you need to know I found a great quote "The difference between a font and a typeface is the same as that between songs and an album. The former makes up the latter. Remember that and you're good to go." ~John Brownlee, *Fast Company*

Consistency
Remember it's all about building trust.

Having your logos labeled correctly and in a folder, using a few typefaces and colors across all your marketing material is a good start to creating a consistent look. A branding guide from a design professional will be more encompassing, but if you need to start somewhere and DIY, this is a solid start. Your goal is to build the trust of your donor base, have them fall in love with your cause and help by giving funds or their time. This will happen over time with consistent marketing.

About

Jeanine Davis is a graphic designer who received her BFA from FIT in Graphic and Advertising Design. Her first gig out of design school was in-house graphics at The Metropolitan Opera and non-profits have been her passion ever since. She has worked with both large and small organizations creating a wide array of marketing materials—from direct mail to gala events. Six years at Publishers Clearing House honed her skills in direct mail. The New York Philharmonic, Jewish Federations of North America, Oliver Scholars, Figure Skating of Harlem and Lutheran Counseling Center are just a few clients that have used her creative services to date.

Jeanine resides on Long Island with her husband, son and menagerie of pets. She actively serves at her son's school and their church and is a merit badge counselor for the graphic design badge in Boy Scouts (unfortunately this is not a popular merit badge). In her down time, she can be found reading or practicing yoga to keep calm and carry on.

Still Have Questions?
Let's connect,
I'm always happy to talk design.